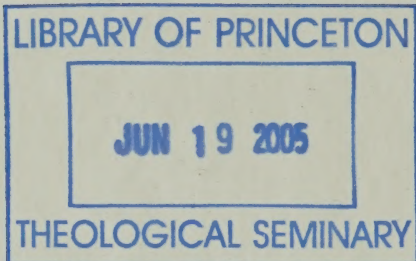


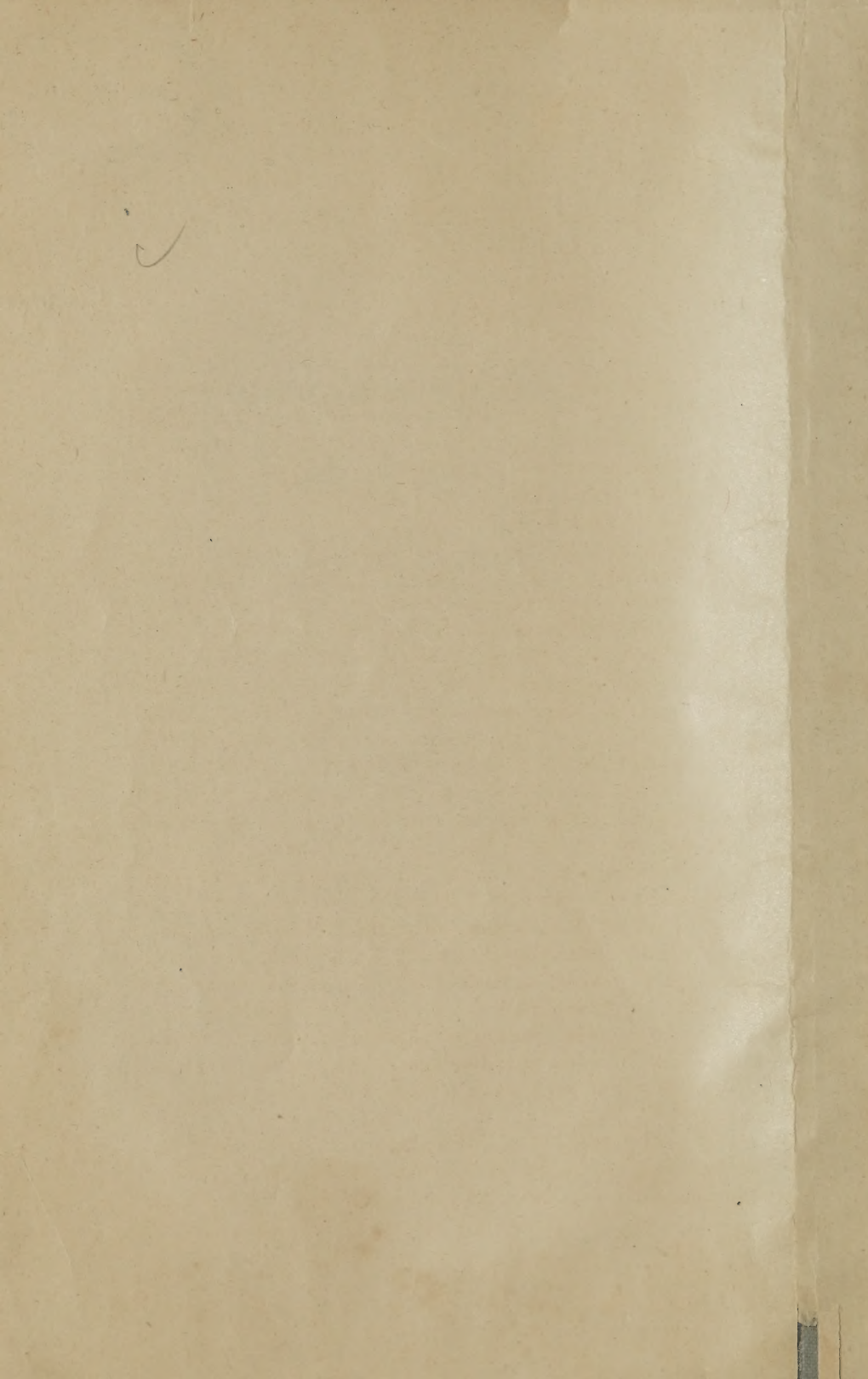
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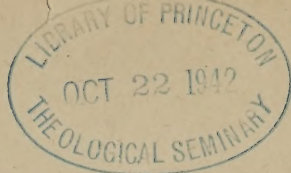
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John Witherspoon, patriot :  
1722-1794.







James Dickie



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JOHN WITHERSPOON,  
PATRIOT.

1722-1794.

John Witherspoon was born at Yester, Haddingtonshire, Scotland, February 5th, 1722. He was a lineal descendant of John Knox, and in due time afforded a notable illustration of the old adage, "blood will always tell." His father was minister of the parish, so that he was, like so many eminent Scotsmen, a son of the Manse. That old Scottish pagan, Rev. Dr. Alexander Carlyle of Inveresk—Jupiter Carlyle as he is usually called,—has told us that old Mr. Witherspoon was an easy going minister of the old school, fonder of a good dinner and an afternoon siesta than of a round of pastoral visits; but towards his household austere and exacting, so that the fun and frolic of the Manse began at 9 p. m., when the minister retired to rest. Witherspoon himself has a different tale to tell, and to this effect, "that his father early began the mental and moral training of his son, that he might be fitted for the ministry of the gospel." For the great fidelity with which he attended to its accomplishment, he often felt and expressed the most pious gratitude towards his venerable parent.

In due time he was sent to the grammar school at Haddington, and in 1736 at the age of 14 he entered Edinburgh University. He had for his contemporaries Robertson, Erskine, Blair, Home and Carlyle, all of whom had brilliant careers and did much to render the latter half of the 18th century the Augustan age of Scottish literature, and to win for Edinburgh her right to the name given her, The Modern Athens. Curiously enough, all of these great churchmen were born in the same year, so that it is remembered in Scotland as the year of the *Brilliant*s.

Of the place where Witherspoon boarded Carlyle says, "we boarded where there was good company, John, afterwards Col. Maxwell and his brother Alexander, Sir Harry Nesbet of Dean and John Dalrymple, now Sir John of Cranstoun. The



future life and public character of Dr. Witherspoon are perfectly known. At the time I speak of, he was a good scholar, far advanced for his age, very sensible and shrewd, but of a disagreeable temper, which was irritated by a flat voice and awkward manner, which prevented his making an impression on his companions of either sex at all adequate to his ability. He was close and suspicious and jealous and always aspiring at a superiority he was not able to maintain; although he had a strong and enlightened understanding far above enthusiasm, and a temper that did not seem liable to it."

I have allowed Carlyle thus far in your presence to vent his spleen. There is much more of the same, and a viler innuendo in a foot note, and this is all due to the fact that Witherspoon was the author of the "Ecclesiastical Characteristics," and became an American of the Americans. Moreover, you must remember the source from which a slander emanates, and the character of him, who thus brutally in cold type reviles his old playmate. But Jupiter Carlyle is decidedly frank, and from his own autobiography we gather that the uncle of Robertson, the historian—old gospel Robertson as they profanely nicknamed him—once said to Carlyle, "Sandie, I relish your wit, but I fear you have not the grace of God." We will remember then that it was from a graceless loon, who unfortunately was brilliant enough to become a Doctor of Divinity and Minister of Inveresk, that these detractions of Witherspoon issue.

In 1743, Witherspoon had completed his eight sessions at Edinburgh University, and was licensed to preach. For some time he officiated in Yester pulpit, and with such acceptance that he was invited to become his father's colleague and successor, but he declined. In 1745, he was called to and accepted the parish church of Beith, Ayrshire—one of the best livings in Scotland. His audience was composed of intelligent townsmen, prosperous farmers, weavers and ploughmen, with a sprinkling of county families or lesser gentry. He belonged to the Evangelicals from the first; that is, instead of the cold glittering moralities that the moderate party furnished in lieu of the gospel, he preached the three R's, ruin in Adam, redemption through Christ, regeneration by the Holy Spirit. Here he

proved himself a faithful pastor, an ardent student, and a genial, if a dignified companion and friend.

Some traditions still linger in Beith of that powerful ministry, that was exercised there a hundred and fifty years ago. Much speculation, it is said, agitated the village gossips as to what a minister wanted with so many books. Such a library had never been seen in Beith parish since grass grew and water ran. Again, the minister used more candles than any three or four families in the country side. The cause was learned, when any late gathering at the inn dispersed, or any wayfarer hied him homeward in the "wee sma hours ayont the twal," for the light in the minister's study window was still burning. Whilst he was thus laying deep and broad the foundations of his great learning, they imagined it could be for no good purpose, that he kept such untimely hours; yet none of them durst ask this dignified young son of Anak the why or the wherefore. Then as he had been at Yester a great angler, and an adept at the golf—that game of games, the game beloved of grave and reverend divines and judges, of professors and advocates, so he could back a steed with any man in the county; and to the last he was a most skillful and graceful rider. He was also the keenest clerical curler Beith parish has ever seen. One of his ministerial brethren on one occasion, waxing bold, asked him, "Do you think curling becoming in a clergyman?" "When God Almighty," answered he right sharply, "makes Kilbirnie loch to bear, he intends us to use his blessing with thankfulness in this most rational recreation." Once upon a time during his Beith pastorate, the frost held firm sway for more than a fortnight. The minister was on the loch the whole week through. Towards sunset, on Saturday, he was swinging his broom over his head and jumping for joy at some famous shot, which one of his side had played, when a man called Williamson (almost the only man in the parish who never went to church) cried, "Mr. Witherspoon, yill he gaun to give them cauld kail het again, the morn,"—meaning an old sermon. Witherspoon turned round, his eyes flashing, and said in tones of withering scorn, "Oh, it's you. I knew it was some man with neither mense nor sense, who was so ready to burn his tongue in other folk's kail." Thus, as we say in Scotland, Williamson "got saut to his kail."



In the beginning of 1746, Scotland was greatly excited by the great rebellion on behalf of the house of Stuart. This was the era of Bonnie Prince Charlie and all the sentimentalism of the Jacobite songs. Never was beautiful sentiment wasted on such an unworthy object. The poetic value of these songs is happily for them in inverse ratio to the worth of the Stuart line. As a descendant of Knox, the young minister of Beith was aflame with enthusiasm for the House of Hanover. Accompanied by a few of his parishioners, he set out for Falkirk in January; some say he intended to serve as a volunteer; others say he went out of mere curiosity to see a battle, and be in at the death of the rebellion. He saw the battle, saw the government troops put to flight by the army of the Pretender, and a troop of Highlanders sweeping round the country took him and his companions prisoners. They were carried to the castle of Doune, which was strongly guarded. The battlements of the castle were seventy feet high, hence it was deemed sufficient to guard the castle gate, and grant the prisoners the freedom of the castle itself. Witherspoon's party resolved to make a rope of their blankets and at dead of night to attempt the descent. They drew lots to determine the order of their going. Witherspoon drew number eight. Five of the party reached the ground in safety. Whilst the sixth was going down the rope broke thirty feet from the ground, but his fall was broken by the efforts of his fellows and he escaped with a few bruises. The rope was drawn up and an additional thirty feet added from the remaining blankets. Whilst the seventh was making his descent the rope suddenly gave way and he was killed. Witherspoon judged it imprudent, therefore, to put his life in jeopardy and returned to his cell, and awaited his liberation, which came in the course of a fortnight. It is said that his health was permanently injured by the hardships of his imprisonment, and that the fits of vertigo which came on him afterwards were caused by the sufferings he endured in these days of his captivity.

Early in his career at Beith, he took a prominent part in his Presbytery and Synod. These were stirring times in Scottish ecclesiastical circles. In 1711 the patronage act of Queen Anne had been passed, that put the right of presenting a minister to the parish into the hands of the patron or chief heritor.



At first the patron was careful to study the wishes of his parishioners. By and bye, however, patrons waxed bold and followed their own inclinations. Often the people rebelled against the intrusion of an unacceptable preacher, and entered a complaint before the Presbytery of the bounds. If the patron was bold enough to stand his ground, what could Presbytery do. If no valid objection to the life, character and doctrine of the preacher could be proven, Presbytery was bound to install him. In some instances, however, the opposition came from the whole parish, and Presbyteries refused to act. Patrons took their appeal to Synod, and from Synod to Assembly. Thus the vexing question of disputed settlements, that ultimately broke the splendid fabric of the church of Knox and Melville into fragments, was before the country and for a whole century it made havoc of the church till in 1843 it rent the remaining portion in twain.

The Evangelicals, of whom Witherspoon soon became a leader and doughty champion, maintained that the call or consent of the people is an essential element in the call to the pastoral office, and that no power on earth can truly confer the pastoral office contrary to the wishes of those to whom he is to minister.

The Moderates, of whom Dr. William Robertson, afterwards Principal of Edinburgh University, became the able leader, held that whenever there were no valid grounds for refusing the installation of a presentee, it was the duty of the Presbytery and of every member thereof to obey the law of the church, which was the law of the land. If they did not—after the Assembly so ordered—discipline was at an end and the unity of the church broken. On the other hand, the Evangelicals replied, that the rights of the christian people could not be trampled in the dust, even by the General Assembly, since they were conferred upon the members of the church by the Lord Jesus Christ, the sole King and head of the church, and that to deprive the people of rights so conferred was to assail the crown rights of the Lord Himself. Thus the purity and the freedom of the church were of higher account in the eyes of this party than even its unity.

The Assembly of 1751 was a notable one. The church for sixty years had enjoyed unbroken rest, free from persecution.

All the evils incident to halcyon days of peace had found place in the church. The stirring, troubled times of the Covenant, with its strong passions, its heroic fervor and its intense though narrow beliefs had gone by. A generation of ministers had grown up within the church, better educated, of a higher culture and with broader views. These views were, however, so broad that Socrates and Plato, had they been living, might have signed the Confession of Faith with as good an assurance of conscience as many ministers of the church—so little regard was paid to conscientious acceptance of doctrinal views in subscribing the Confession. It was a form to be observed, and a minister might swallow it with the best grace he could, but it really meant nothing, bound you to no fixed doctrinal belief whatever. Such was the theory, and such, unfortunately, was too often the practice. It was the Augustan age of Scottish literature, but, alas! it was the dreary, iron age of Scottish religious life. The Scepticism of Shaftesbury, as embodied in his "Characteristics," was the fashionable philosophy of the day. Professor Francis Hutcheson, of Glasgow, embraced Shaftesbury's system, and his class-room was soon crowded, and he became the idol of the rising ministry.

The pulpit of the moderate party glorified virtue, and regarded sin as a mere misfortune. Even Dr. William Robertson so far forgot the message wherewith he was entrusted, as to declare, in a morning discourse, "So beautiful is virtue, and so strong man's natural love of it, that were virtue personified to descend from heaven, all the world would fall down and worship." Dr. Robertson had for his colleague, an evangelical of the evangelicals, Dr. Erskine, and on the afternoon of the same day, the same Greyfriars pulpit rang out with this weighty word: "Virtue personified did indeed once come into the world in the person of Jesus Christ, but instead of worshipping, the world crucified him—so little love has the world for virtue."

The broad church party aspired to power. In the Assembly of 1751, to the astonishment of the grey heads, who were accustomed to rule, Home and Robertson sprang to the front and moved that the Assembly stand by the rights conferred by the Patronage Act of 1711. This was the Assembly at which Witherspoon also leaped to the front rank as a debater, and was marked out as the future leader of the Evangelicals, just



as clearly as Robertson was marked out as leader of the Moderates.

Many a goodly and gallant struggle these two had in the Assemblies that followed. Robertson most frequently carried a majority into his lobby, because his party was better organized and the Moderates voted in a solid phalanx. With a statesman's eye, Witherspoon saw the weak points in the discipline of the Evangelicals, and laboring with might and main introduced order and concerted action into the bands of his party. The two leaders were old playmates and college chums, and they were always chivalrous antagonists (unlike Jupiter Carlyle), and many a word of playful banter passed between them, as they met in the lobbies of the house after the vote. On one occasion victory inclining to the side of the Evangelicals, Robertson playfully said, "I think, John, your troops are better disciplined than formerly." "Yes," said Witherspoon, "by urging politics too far, you have compelled us to beat you with your own weapons."

The tide of broad Churchism was sweeping in like a flood. The favorite maxim of the Moderates was Shaftesbury's word, "Ridicule is the test of truth." That word was the cuckoo cry of the party, dinned incessantly into men's ears. The idea occurred to Witherspoon of employing this maxim for another end. Ridicule may not be the test of truth, but it may, thought Witherspoon, be the detector of error. He would try. He would give the Moderates an inch of their own ellwand and see how they would relish it. The candles burned later into the night than ever all through the year 1752, until he fluttered the dovescots of Moderatism by publishing "Ecclesiastical Characteristics or the Arcana of Church Policy—being an humble attempt to open the Mystery of Moderatism." It was published anonymously and created a perfect furor of excitement. It was universally popular, and quickly passed through five editions, and people were as eager to find out the name of this Pascal of the north as the Scots of the next century were to identify the author of the Waverley novels. It happened to fall into the hands of Samuel Davies, President of Princeton, who was then in Great Britain seeking to interest the British Churches in the young Colonial College of which he was the head, and the name of the author was flashed across

the Atlantic in a letter he wrote. This was the first point of contact between Witherspoon and America, and I quote Davies' interesting words. "There is a piece published under the title of the "Ecclesiastical Characteristics", ascribed to one Dr. Witherspoon, a young minister. It is a burlesque upon the high flyers under the name of moderate men, and I think the humour is nothing inferior to Dean Swift."

No wonder that it attracted the attention of Davies, that prince of preachers, for it was for years the theme of discussion all over Britain. It lays bare the principles and practices of the men of moderation, especially of the typical moderate, of whom it was asked, "Is he a moderate?" "Yes, fierce for moderation." If any one in these days is in doubt as to the accuracy of the portraiture, all he has to do is to read the autobiography of Rev. Dr. Alexander Carlyle of Inveresk, and he will see how keenly the satire cut and how deeply the wound rankled, when he reads the unjust and ungenerous slanders of Witherspoon, that Carlyle retails.

In a serious apology for the Characteristics, of which in 1756 he avowed himself the author, he defends his use of satire, inasmuch as it is sometimes used in the word of God, and employed by Tertullian in early days, and by Pascal in his famous Provincial letters. This defence is an admirable piece of literary work, and a complete justification of himself, as well as a demonstration of the sad state of doctrine and morals in the church, and a powerful plea for the cause of the Evangelicals. Thus it appeared that the author of this caustic work was abundantly able to take his own part and could wield the cudgel of controversy with the best of them, illustrating the old Scottish motto: *Nemo me impune lacessit*, or, as we paraphrased it in our school days: "Them, that comes in my road, takes what they gets." Moreover it is interesting to know that many of the most learned and pious of the English Bishops, notably Dr. Warburton, one of the most eminent authors of his day, gave the most unqualified praise to the work in words like these, "A fine piece of raillery directed against a party, to which we are no strangers here." "I wish our own clergy would read it for their own instruction and correction."

Some idea of the contents of this remarkable work may be gathered from its thirteen maxims, which give us the gist of the whole matter.



I. All Ecclesiastical persons of whatever rank, whether principals of colleges, professors of divinity, ministers or even probationers, that are suspected of heresy, are to be esteemed men of great genius, vast learning, and uncommon worth ; and are by all means to be supported and protected.

II. When any man is charged with loose practices, or tendencies to immorality, he is to be screened and protected as much as possible; especially if the faults laid to his charge be, as they are incomparably well termed in a sermon preached by a hopeful youth, that made some noise lately, "good humored vices."

III. It is a necessary part of the character of a moderate man to speak of the Confession of Faith but with a sneer ; to give sly hints that he does not thoroughly believe it, and to make the word of orthodoxy a term of contempt and reproach.

IV. A good preacher must not only have all the above and subsequent principles of moderation in him, as the source of everything that is good, but must, over and above, have the following special marks and signs of a talent for preaching : 1st. His subjects must be confined to social duties. 2d. He must recommend them only from rational considerations, viz., the beauty and comely proportions of virtue and its advantages in the present life, without any regard to a future state of more extended self-interest. 3d. His authorities must be drawn from heathen writers ; *none*, or as few as possible, from Scripture. 4th. He must be very unacceptable to the common people.

V. A minister must endeavor to acquire as great a degree of politeness in his carriage and behaviour, and to catch as much of the air and manner of a fine gentleman, as possibly he can.

VI. It is not only unnecessary for a moderate man to have much learning, but he ought to be filled with a contempt of all kinds of learning but one—which is to understand Leibnitz's scheme well, the chief parts of which are so beautifully painted and so harmoniously sung by Lord Shaftesbury, and which has been so well licked into form and method by the late immortal Mr. Hutcheson.

VII. A moderate man must endeavor, as much as he handsomely can, to put off any appearances of devotion and avoid all unnecessary exercises of religious worship, whether public or private.

VIII. In church settlements, which are the principal causes that come before ministers for judgment, the only thing to be regarded is, who the patron and the great and noble heritors are for ; the inclinations of the common people are to be utterly despised.

IX. While a settlement is carrying on, the candidate against whom there is a strong opposition from the people must be looked upon and everywhere declared to be a man of great

worth and remarkable abilities ; provided always that if ever the same person, after he is settled, be at pains and succeed in gaining the people's affections, he shall then fall as much below the ordinary standard in his character as before he was raised above it.

X. Whenever we have got a settlement decided over the body, perhaps, of the whole people in the parish, by a majority in the General Assembly, the victory should be improved by appointing some of the orthodox opposers of the settlement to execute it, especially those of them that pretend a scruple of conscience at having an active hand in any such settlement.

XI. The character, which moderate men give their adversaries, of the orthodox party, must always be that of "knaves" or "fools"; and, as occasion serves, the same person (if it will pass) may be represented as a "knave" at one time and a "fool" at another.

XII. As to the world in general, a moderate man is to have great charity for Atheists and Deists in principle, and for persons that are loose and vicious in their practice, but none at all for those that have a high profession of religion and a great pretence to strictness in their walk and conversation.

XIII. All moderate men are joined together in the strictest bond of union, and do never fail to support and defend one another to the utmost be the cause they are engaged in what it will.

It was evident that a man of such masculine intellect, mounting so rapidly into literary fame and ecclesiastical leadership, could not be allowed to remain in a country parish, how generous soever the emoluments of office there might be. It was no surprise to any when he was called to the High Church, Paisley, nor was it any surprise that, when he accepted, the moderate clergy in the Presbytery of Paisley should seek to bar the way. The Synod of Glasgow, however, overruled the Presbytery, and, as a mark of its appreciation, elected him Moderator next year. He was accordingly installed in 1757. Just as he was leaving Beith, he published one of the best of his theological treatises under the title, "Justification, or the Connection between Imputed Righteousness and Holiness of Life."

The large town of Paisley, where his lot was now cast, has always appreciated intellectual gifts. Its inhabitants, as they are the soberest, are the most intelligent community in Scotland. Earl Beaconsfield, with his accustomed insight, has said, "If you wish to see the direction of the currents of British thought, keep your eye on Paisley."



Here Witherspoon ministered to a congregation of 1,500, who hung upon his pulpit utterances with rapt attention. His memory is still cherished and revered there as that of a faithful and powerful preacher. His discourses were marked more by intellectual force and power than by flights of fancy or flowers of rhetoric. He was bold in the denunciation of sin. Like many another town in Scotland in that dark era, Paisley had a Hell Fire Club, whose members delighted in ridiculing religion. Whenever the sacramental season came round, these clubs indulged, on the Saturday before the communion, in a mock celebration of the Lord's Supper. The soul of Witherspoon revolted at such impious conduct, and he preached a powerful sermon addressed to the young, in which he warned them against the awful danger and enormity of such foul wickedness. He published this sermon, and appended a note in which the names of those, who were said to have participated in this blasphemous orgy, were printed in full. At once an action of criminal libel was instituted against him. Whilst, in his defence, he justified his charge as true, he was unable to adduce sufficient proof of the accuracy of his allegations. Hence, he was convicted and mulcted in a heavy fine. This, together with the legal expenses, landed him in financial difficulties, from which, by the help of friends, he speedily extricated himself.

The year 1756 was a notable—nay, it was a notorious year in the history of the Scottish Church. The accomplished and beautiful actress, Mrs. Sarah Siddons, visited Edinburgh and played on alternate days during the sessions of the General Assembly.

Edinburgh has always prided itself (and does even to the present) that it is the authoritative judge par excellence of dramatic ability. No actor, however great his popularity and success may be in London, can boast that he has won the verdict of the highest tribunal in the world, until the plaudits of the Edinburgh public have rung in his ears. Edinburgh laymen, high in ecclesiastical circles, have never made any secret of their delight in high dramatic art, nor can the discussion of matters connected with the theatre be banished from the tables of Scotia's clerical leaders, when judges, professors, learned lawyers, and cultured dames surround the board. I presume, that even as early as 1756, the religious laity of

Edinburgh had made their hearts hard against whatever remembrances her clergy might urge regarding the evil of frequenting, what one Presbytery designated, "the temple of Satan." At all events, this young and increasing band of moderate ministers so absented themselves from the assembly on the days when Mrs. Siddons appeared upon the boards, that it became necessary to transact mere routine business on these days, and fix the weighty matters for the days that were free. This was the occasion of much scandal. Scotland had never counted on her clergy becoming adherents of the playhouse. But Edinburgh and all Scotland were about to be still more scandalized, for on the 14th of December, 1756, at the Canon-gate theatre, the tragedy of Douglas, written by Rev. John Home, minister of Athelstaneford, was produced for the first time. This was to the dismay of the whole country. A storm of indignant protest swept across the little kingdom from sea to sea. The clergy might clasp hands with the ministers of iniquity, if they would, but the people were roused as in the days of the Covenant. In spite of all this, the piece had an unprecedented run. It was lauded to the skies as the greatest tragedy since the days of Shakespeare, and not unworthy of the bard of Avon himself. Posterity has not endorsed this opinion, and the dull heavy tragedy has been gathered into the tomb of all the Capulets. Till a recent period, however, one of the speeches beginning, "My name is Norval, on the Grampian hills"—might be met with, in school selections for oratory.

The Evangelical party in the church bestirred itself. The Presbyteries began to take action against those clergy, who had been present. Many of them were censured. Jupiter Carlyle told his Presbytery to libel him if they dared; if he had done wrong, he told them, it was a mere act of indiscretion or indecorum, and thus he set his Presbytery at defiance.

What would Scotland have said, if it had been known and noised abroad, that the first rehearsal of the tragedy had taken place (as it is now publicly asserted by nearly all who write on Edinburgh) at the house of an actress, Mrs. Sarah Wardle, who lived in the Horse Wynd, and that Rev. Dr. Robertson, Hume the historian, Dr. Carlyle of Inveresk, and Rev. John Home played the leading male parts, whilst the female parts were essayed by Rev. Dr. Blair and Professor Adam Ferguson.



It was at this juncture, that Dr. Witherspoon wrote and published his book on the "Nature and Effects of the Stage." This work represents the author at his best. It is an armory for the assailant of the stage. The argument is remarkable for its marshalling and use of facts. The fathers, the heathen moralists, and christian writers of bye-gone days were laid under contribution. If any one desires, to set this subject before men with weight of argument, and trenchant use of facts, he could not do better than edit this admirable work, changing nothing, except the most virulent and unqualified attack made on the characters of players. That is the only blot, but it is enough to damage the whole of that branch of the argument. You don't need to call every actor a villain, nor charge every actress with loose living, to maintain the church's attitude towards the stage. Moreover, thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor, is written of old time, and is to be remembered for ever, for players as for preachers. I suppose the vehemence of the debate led him into stronger statements, than justice and equity warranted. With the exception noted, the work is admirable; it enriched the author's fame, and did yeoman service in the cause, to which it was devoted; and John Home was forced (to escape the church's censure) to demit his sacred office, and betake himself to those literary pursuits, for which he had greater aptitude.

For ten years Witherspoon had been a resident of Paisley. Great, doubtless was his influence upon the town, but fully as great was the influence of his environment upon him. Paisley has ever been a hot-bed of the most advanced political views. It is a splendid training school in political science. Every weaver is a politician. Republicanism is in the air, and in one of his speeches in 1762 Witherspoon spoke of Scotland, as this "Republic" of ours. Was not this thought the herald and harbinger of great thoughts yet to be?

Be this as it may, his fame was spreading far and wide. Aberdeen University had made him a Doctor of Divinity in 1764, when the degree was rarer than now; and in 1765 he had declined calls to Dundee, Scotland, to Dublin, Ireland, and to the famous Scotch church at Rotterdam, Holland. His parishioners were just beginning to breathe freely again, when the

trustees of Princeton invited him to become President of the college of New Jersey. After a good deal of discussion of the matter with Richard Stockton Esq., one of the trustees then in Britain, and particularly owing to the unwillingness of Mrs. Witherspoon to leave her native land, the call was declined. It was, however, believed by the trustees, that Witherspoon was not easy in his mind in regard to his declination. The matter was again opened privately by some of the trustees, and rumors of this having reached the ears of an old bachelor relative, of large fortune, he offered to make Witherspoon his sole heir, on condition of his remaining in Scotland. This, however, did not avail, and the unwillingness of Mrs. Witherspoon having been overcome, and Rev. Samuel Blair, who had been elected president having withdrawn most generously, Witherspoon cried, *Cras iterabimus ingens aequor* — westward ho. On the eve of his departure, his essays were published in London in three volumes; a volume of his sermons was published in Edinburgh, and a volume in Glasgow.

Witherspoon arrived at Princeton in August, 1768, just a century earlier than the arrival of another distinguished Scot, Dr. Jas. MacCosh. On the 17th of August, he was installed president of the college. Princeton had thus the good fortune to secure a president, who in respect of piety, literary gifts, and intellectual power, was no unworthy successor of those who preceded him, and no unworthy precursor of those to come after him. He was in the very flower of his manhood, forty-six years of age, a man of commanding stature, and splendid physique, possessed of a strong and vigorous mind, and a devotion to learning, that was rich in promise. He was acquainted with the most advanced theories, and in accord with the most approved educational methods of Europe, and he had all that power of adapting himself to new surroundings, that makes the Scot the most cosmopolitan of all the families of the earth. He can make a place for himself, and be at home anywhere.

It was a great matter for Princeton to have secured a man of such world wide fame and so great ability at just such a juncture. It was a great advantage for the cause of literature and science and religion in America, that such a representative had been won to these shores. It was a great thing for the cause of liberty in these United States, that a great church-statesman,

imbued with the broad political views of Paisley town, had been induced to cross the Atlantic, that when liberty's sacred hour dawned, the man should be at hand, who was ordained of God to strike the supreme blow in the council chamber of the young nation, as Washington did in the wilder arena of battle's magnificently stern array.

It was a great matter for Princeton. The reputation of the college, that had from the first been high, was beginning to wane. The twenty years of its childhood had been years of remarkable promise. It had been its good fortune, to secure for its presidents the acute and erudite Dickinson, the scholarly and courtly Aaron Burr, the saintly and intellectual Jonathan Edwards, Davies, of fervid and impetuous eloquence, and that splendid Scotch-Irishman, Samuel Finley, the first American divine, who received the doctor's degree from a British university. But the very brief period, of each successive incumbency, had proved a great disadvantage and discouragement. The acceptance of the presidency of Princeton seemed the *avant-coureur* of the angel of death. Dickinson's term of office was one year, Burr's eight years, Edwards' a few months, Davies' two years and a half, Finley's four years. The shortened lives of the presidents were, as Witherspoon tells us, universally attributed to their excessive labors and responsibilities. Moreover the trustees were divided among themselves as well as discouraged, when the advent of this splendid Scot re-united and re-animated them. There was nothing to be despaired of for Princeton under such leadership. *Nil desperandum Teucro duce et auspice Teucro*, was the jubilant cry. With a deep sense of responsibility and with a stout heart set to a stey brae, he entered on his new field. "Just picture to yourselves," he says, "one that had been accustomed for twenty years to preach to an audience of 1,500 souls every day, and all subject to my own pastoral oversight and discipline, now to have such a thin and negligent assembly, and mostly composed of those, who think themselves under no obligation to attend, but when they pleased. In such a situation the sphere seems to be greatly narrowed, but if I am made instrumental in sending out faithful laborers into the harvest, it will be an ample recompense; for as one of great zeal and discernment in Great Britain said to me, 'You will be greatly mortified to see the difference



between a small country society in America, and a large city congregation in Scotland, but if you be instrumental in sending out ministers of the New Testament it will be a still more important station, for every gownsman is a legion.'"

With such heart and hope he entered his work. Students gathered round him in whom he soon recognized spirits that appreciated the union of piety and learning that was in him, and that was his favorite theme—his life text, as it was the keynote of his inaugural address—and through whom he felt he could exert an abiding influence for good on the land of his adoption.

✓ "Unite together piety and learning. Some persons truly and perhaps eminently pious from an inward conviction that piety is better than all the learning in the world, and perhaps observing that ill-principled persons—the more learning they have the more dangerous they are—have come to despise learning itself, as if the natural talent were to blame for the moral depravity. Of those who profess religion, some also, from a forward zeal, are impatient to begin the ministry before they are fitted for the charge. Such persons are often insensible to the hurt they do to the interests of religion, and how much they injure the truths of God by their manner of handling them. On the other hand, there are some who proceed well in early life, but applying with vigor and success to their studies, become too much engrossed with human learning and think themselves such great scholars that they are too proud to be Christians. \* \* Piety without learning is but little profitable, and learning without piety is pernicious to others and ruinous to its possessor." He is but a poor clerk who will not say "Amen," to such weighty sentiments.

The aim of his life at Princeton was to train men to be first of all Christians, then accurate scholars and polished gentlemen. As he taught by eloquent words, himself was the living example of his own teaching. The power of his words lay in his own splendid life and character, manifested before them.

His manners were of the old world type, more formal and ceremonious than those of to-day. He was dignified and courteous. It was his custom, to the last, to wear the knee breeches, silk stockings, shoes with silver buckles, and the old dress coat with its elongated waistcoat, which even to this day

remains the garb of the moderator of the Scottish General Assemblies. His manners were of a piece with the fashion of his dress.

"I cannot help thinking," he used to say, "that true religion is not only consistent with but necessary to true politeness. There is a noble sentiment to this purpose illustrated at considerable length in the Port Royal Essays, 'That worldly politeness is no more than an imitation or imperfect copy of Christian charity, being the pretence or appearance of that deference to the judgment and attention to the interests of others, which a true Christian has as the rule of his life and the disposition of his heart.'"

What a work this man did for Princeton! The college was poor, and in the long vacation he journeyed from Massachusetts to Virginia kindling interest in the cause of Christian education and pleading earnestly for financial endowments. In a notable address to the inhabitants of Jamaica he solicits patronage for the college, proving that there their sons may be trained in sound and accurate learning and under excellent moral control and moral surroundings that characterized Princeton. ✓

Almost single handed, with the help of only two or three tutors at first, he sought to do the whole work of a University. By and bye a professorship of mathematics was instituted; later the classical tutorship was elevated into a professorship. He introduced oratorical contests after the manner of the Dialectic Society of Edinburgh University, then leaping into fame as a training ground for public speaking. He was moreover, the first to introduce the system of teaching by means of lectures into America—a method that had been long in vogue in the Universities of Europe. To the last years of his active occupancy of the president's office, he lectured on divinity, on moral philosophy, on belles-lettres and on history, and gave instructions in Hebrew and French. ✓

His lectures on belles-lettres were abreast of the teaching in the Universities of Great Britain. He always claimed that he anticipated Blair in his philosophic treatment of the principles of rhetoric. The notes of these lectures, that have come down to us, show that they were characterized by sound judgment and good taste. Yet it would seem as if all appreciation of poetry had been left out of his composition. He quotes but

one line of Shakespeare, Milton not once, Pope but twice, and the lyrics of that young Ayrshire plowman that were already beginning to set Scottish hearts aflame seem never to have touched him. A strange defect this, we would say, in one who was a professor of belles-lettres.

His lectures on philosophy are of kin to the modern Scottish school of Reid and Stewart and Hamilton, and that finds so able an advocate in Dr. McCosh—a school of thought that founds ethics upon the postulate of a benevolent and just God, and that regards conscience, not as a mere sentiment, but as the vicegerent of God within the soul.

His lectures on Divinity are as sound, scriptural, and judicious as those of Hill, though they are neither so complete nor so learned. Yet there is a breadth of view combined with his warm evangelical strain of piety that is remarkable. For example, he says, "The whole economy of our salvation teaches us the necessity of attending to and believing the doctrine of the Trinity, but I see neither necessity nor propriety in endeavoring to dip into the mode of it and attempting to explain it." "The moral law as it requires obedience to the will and conformity to the nature of God was binding on the angels of God before the creation of the world. The moral law, carrying a sentence of condemnation against every transgression, is abrogated. But the moral law, as the unalterable rule of duty is antecedent to all covenants, and cannot be affected by them \* \* \* In proportion as a man increases in holiness of heart he increases in usefulness of life, and acquires a deeper and stronger sense of the value of time."

That breadth of view is a praiseworthy feature, and one that characterizes Princeton to this hour, and keeps her in the golden mean between the extreme wings of the old and new school types of theological thought in the Presbyterian Church. Orthodox without bigotry, learned without the pride of learning, evangelical without fanaticism, eager to know all that may be known of God's work and will, yet content to remain in ignorance of all that belongeth unto the secret counsels of God, Witherspoon set a high standard for Princeton, and Princeton has never faltered in the path of progress with caution towards which he marshalled her.

Never had an educator such a career, if success is to be



taken as the measure of efficiency. Of the 469 graduates of the college during his regime, 114 became ministers of the gospel, 19 presidents or professors of colleges, 27 others became men of light and leading in their several churches. Of the remaining 355 who went into secular pursuits, one was president of the United States, one vice-president, six were members of the Continental Congress, 20 were senators of the United States, 33 members of United States House of Representatives, 13 governors of states, three judges of Supreme Court of United States, 20 United States officers in the Army of the Revolution, and 30 others were distinguished in medicine, letters, or law. Thus it was to no narrower sphere, but to such a position of influence as falls to the lot of few, that he attained, when he relinquished Scotland for Princeton.

What an advantage it was for the cause of religion, and of our common Presbyterianism, that he had been induced to set his face westward. Perhaps he was no better preacher than some native born Americans. In fervid eloquence and grace of manner, he was not the peer either of John Livingstone or William White; much less was he to be compared to his own predecessor that prince of preachers, Samuel Davies, whose memory was still fresh and green, when he reached their shores. But the fame he had won served to lift him into remarkable prominence, and prominence in such a man is a mighty power. An admirable textuary, a profound theologian, perspicuous and simple in his manner, an universal scholar, acquainted deeply with human nature, a grave, dignified and solemn speaker, he was a splendid model for those who had the sacred ministry in view. Again his great experience as a church statesman, acquired in the Scottish Assembly in stirring times, was of inestimable value. Maintaining always that he had been brought up in a Presbyterian church, that hath no contempt or detestation of those who are differently organized, he was a loyal and unswerving, but never a narrow or bitter Presbyterian. He loved all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ, but he loved his own church the best.

It was a liberal education, in the methods of conducting the public business of the Church with propriety and order and promptness, to sit in the Church courts along with him. Leadership naturally fell into his hands, and his leadership leavened the whole Church with that love of liberty and order, that

animated his own breast. "We have seen him in our own Church judicatories in America," says Dr. Rodger, "always right in his views, remarkable for his punctuality in attending them, and able to seize at once the right point of view in every question, able to disentangle the most embarrassed subjects, clear and conclusive in his reasonings, and from habit in business as well as from a peculiar soundness in judgment always conducting every discussion to the most speedy and decisive termination. The Church has certainly had in him one of her greatest lights, and if I may use the term in ecclesiastical affairs, one of her greatest politicians."

It was a great thing for the cause of liberty, that this man became a resident in this land. The blood of Knox, that was in his veins, surged up wildly and proclaimed its native origin, when the first blow of oppression struck the colonies. Deep, deep, was his love of Scotland. In an address to the Scots in America, the Scottish blood tingles as with an honorable pride he says, "I have never seen cause to be ashamed of the place of my birth. Since the revival of letters, the natives of Scotland have been in no degree inferior to those of any other country for genius, erudition, military prowess or any of these accomplishments which improve or embellish human nature." (We have marked his loyalty to the House of Hanover, so long as loyalty was a virtue.) "And he expresses the hope that an honest and faithful support of liberty in this part of the world will be no just reproach to his character either as a scholar, a minister or a Christian, and it is perfectly consistent with an undiminished regard for the country which gave him birth."

He is ignorant of the history of the American Revolution or of the relation of the Presbyterian Church to it, and especially of that of the Scotch-Irish laity and clergy thereto, who would say that the issue would have been different, had Witherspoon stayed in native Scotia. The clarion tones of the Mecklenburg Declaration, that gave expression to the position of the Presbyterian Church, and marked out for Jefferson the lines along which the Declaration of Independence should move, give us the assurance that they must be free or die, who speak the tongue John Knox did speak, the faith and morals hold that Calvin held. But yet, the determined attitude of Witherspoon, a native born Scot, a man of yesterday within the land, put

the position of this Church beyond peradventure. When his voice rang out against Great Britain as playing the part of the oppressor, who could refrain himself from the battle! who could doubt the duty of the hour! Coming from that land

“Where Knox taught the world all oppression to spurn  
And the watch fires of freedom eternally burn,”

he could no more refrain, from leaping into the arena and striking for freedom, than he could sit quietly in Beith Manse in the year '45, when the House of Hanover was stricken by the Jacobite hosts.

Only eight years have gone by since he left Scotland, but they have made him a leal hearted American, and when the voice of his fellow-citizens calls him to aid in framing a new constitution for their State in 1776 he heeds the call; they call him to take part in the removal of their governor, and he accepts the trust. He is called as a delegate to the Continental Congress, 21st June, 1776, and walking in, in his clerical dress, gown, bands and all, he takes his seat. He is the only clergyman in that body, but it is as a clergyman, that he will go. He will clothe himself for Congress with the gown of authority as God's servant, as he clothes himself for the pulpit. He is the minister of God, called now to civil, as before to sacred functions. He is the minister always, less than the minister never.

The days go by and the great question comes up for settlement, “Are the times ripe for severing the bond between Britain and America?” “Ripe,” thunders Witherspoon, “if we do not act soon, they will be rotten.” Again, when a waver of indecision strikes the Assembly at the supreme moment, into the breach springs Witherspoon: “That noble instrument upon your table, which insures immortality to its author, should be subscribed this very morning by every pen in the house. He that will not respond to its accents and strain every nerve to carry into effect its provisions is unworthy of the name of freeman. For my own part, of property I have some, of reputation more; that reputation is staked, that property is pledged on the issue of this contest. And although these gray hairs must soon descend into the sepulchre, I would infinitely rather they should descend thither by the hands of the public executioner, than desert at this crisis the sacred cause of my country.”



In that hour he stands at the very crown and zenith of his illustrious career. Borne up on the crest of liberty's glad wave, he wins universal consent to a deed of daring, at which all the world wonders. That sacred fire, that burned within his heroic bosom, only caused the pent up fires in other men's souls to burst into flame. That dauntless word carried every Scot who loved freedom to freedom's side; it fused the whole Presbyterian Church into deathless loyalty to the glorious cause. It gave inspiration to heroic deeds that will shed lustre on the Presbyterian Church, so long as the fires of liberty shall burn on the altars of our nation. Caldwell of Springfield, showed when the hour came, that his heart responded to the bugle blast Witherspoon sounded, and one of our own poets has embalmed the glorious act in goodly and graceful numbers.

Here's the spot. Look around you. Above on the height  
Lay the Hessians encamped. By that church on the right  
Stood the gaunt Jersey farmers, and here ran a wall—  
You may dig anywhere, and you'll turn up a ball.  
Nothing more. Grasses spring, waters run, flowers blow,  
Pretty much as they did ninety-three years ago.

Nothing more did I say? Stay, one moment; you've heard  
Of Caldwell, the parson, who once preached the word  
Down at Springfield? What, no? Come, that's bad! Why he had  
All the Jerseys aflame, and they gave him the name  
Of "the rebel high priest." He stuck in their gorge,  
For he loved the Lord God and he hated King George.

He had cause, you might say! When the Hessians that day  
Marched up with Knyphausen, they stopped on their way  
At the "farms," where his wife, with a child in her arms,  
Sat alone in the house. How it happened, none knew  
But God, and that one of the hireling crew  
Who fired the shot. Enough! there she lay,  
And Caldwell, the chaplain, her husband, away!

Did he preach—did he pray? Think of him, as you stand  
By the old church, to-day! think of him, and that band  
Of militant ploughboys! See the smoke and the heat  
Of that reckless advance—of that struggling retreat!  
Keep the ghost of that wife, foully slain, in your view—  
And what could you, what should you, what would *you* do?

Why, just what *he* did! They were left in the lurch  
For the want of more wadding. He ran to the church,  
Broke the door, stripped the pews, and dashed out in the road  
With his arms full of hymn books, and threw down his load  
At their feet! Then above all the shouting and shots  
Rang his voice, "Put Watts into 'em!—Boys, give 'em Watts!"

And they did. That is all. Grasses spring, flowers blow,  
Pretty much as they did ninety-three years ago;  
You may dig anywhere and you'll turn up a ball,  
But not always a hero like this—and that's all.

—*Bret Harte.*

From 1776 till 1782 (with but a brief interval in 1779) he served in Congress, and proved that he was as well qualified for leadership in the legislative halls of the nation, as in the Assemblies of the Church. In the department of finance he developed remarkable talent. No one of that era was his peer in matters of finance, save only that incomparable genius, Alexander Hamilton. His essay on money did much to lead the nation back from a path, that proved so fatal to France, through its issue of Assignats. His writings on the currency are of value to this hour.

Employed on the secret committee of Congress on the prosecution of the war, on the committee of three to confer with Washington in the military crisis of November, 1776, on the Committee on the Commissariat, in every department he proved himself of rare value, and his calmness and fortitude in darkest hours of the republic often set men's fears at rest. Men gathered faith from his faith in the sacred cause, and courage from his courage. Many of the addresses to the people bear the marks of his judicious and able pen. Some of the state papers were prepared by him. There is one in particular, "The Memorial and Manifesto of the United States of North America to the Mediating Powers in the Conference for Peace, to the other Powers in Europe, and in general to all who shall see the same," which should be studied with care, as it will be read with glowing interest, by every American citizen. It is marked by that wondrous marshalling of facts and arguments, for which he is famous. It puts the case for the United States with great cogency, simplicity, dignity and power. The fury of the volcanic fires, that smoulder in the heart of a Scotsman, when roused, is held admirably in check; but you have a strong impression of the pent up fires, that are burning beneath the solid pavement of words, over which you pass. This state paper is a terrible indictment of Great Britain, and an instrument of state worthy to rank beside those of the greatest of our Secretaries of State.

Nor need any Presbyterian or Christian of any name blush

for the great Pastor-President now turned Politician—nay great Statesman. The power of his piety exerted itself as strongly in the Senate chamber, as it did in the class-room of the college and the pulpit of the town. He passed through the fires of public life with a name, not only untarnished but rather, brightened and burnished with the splendid lustre of renown.

It was, however, with a glad heart that he turned his back, in 1782, on a public career, and sought the quiet and classic shades of his beloved Princeton. They say, that as he was on his homeward journey, some well-meaning but over-zealous youth accosted him (not knowing who he was) with the word, "Sir, have you got religion?" "None to speak of," was the pithy and characteristic answer.

He is back again at Princeton, welcomed with acclaim. No more is he to wear out his years in the labours of the class-room, but from the retirement of his villa or farm of Tusculum—name pregnant in its promise of repose—his hand is still to direct the institution, though his son-in-law, Dr. Stanhope Smith, has come to teach in his stead.

The war had dealt a sad blow to the cause of education, as it had paralyzed everything. The troops had made barracks of the college buildings. They had carried off all the stock from Witherspoon's farm, to his great regret; for from childhood's days in Yester Manse there was always a bucolic element in his life. Students and professors had alike been scattered. Now, the era of reconstruction had come. The young college was girding itself anew for its task. In the depressed state of its finances, he was asked by the trustees to visit Great Britain, and solicit funds for its help. He predicted that his mission would be unsuccessful, and so it proved. Indeed it needed no prophet to foretell the result. But they urged him so strongly, that a refusal would have been interpreted as lack of devotion to his college, and so he undertook the forlorn hope. At the age of 60 he braved the sea once more, in an age when it was no trivial adventure to pass over to Europe. He reached his native land. He was welcomed to his old church at Paisley, but the Edinburgh and Glasgow pulpits were shut against him. His action in the revolutionary struggle had been marked against him. "*Et tu, Brute,*" had been the feeling of Britain, when he had leapt into the breach.



He had staked his friendships and fame in Scotland, and lost. Former friends were cold and distant. Meeting an old college friend—perhaps it was Robertson or Blair—one would rather like to think it was Alexander Carlyle—he held out his hand. He thought the old boyhood's associations would bring a kindly greeting, but no hand was proffered in return. "What!" said he, "will you not even shake hands with me?" "Nay, the Apostle John would not have clasped hands with Judas Iscariot, nor will I with the betrayer of his country." And so he turned his face westwards toward the land that loved him, and in the retirement of Tusculum passed the last quiet decade of his life.

During the last two years of his life he was almost totally blind, but he bore his affliction with a patience and cheerfulness rarely to be met with, even in those most eminent for wisdom and piety. They led him by the hand, and he entered the pulpit as of yore and preached with as great impressiveness and unction as in the hey-day of his power. At the Commencement at Princeton in 1794, he presided with a propriety and dignity long remembered. On the 15th of November of the same year he fell asleep, and they buried him in that graveyard at Princeton that holds so much saintly dust, beneath the shadow of the college which he loved so vehemently and served so well.

His work is his monument and his memorial. It was eminently fitting that on the centennial of the nation, "the Church whose spirit he so eminently represented in his civil career and citizens whose rights he advocated should erect to him a monument" in Fairmount Park, Philadelphia. He is represented in that colossal statue in the same clerical costume I have described, the Geneva gown hanging in graceful folds from his shoulders. His true monument, however, is Princeton itself, the college and the seminary. His work is his memorial, and his career an inspiration. Even yet from his ashes the clarion call to duty rings out, Let every soul among you ennoble itself by the solemn vow, "The cause of piety, the cause of learning, the cause of liberty,


I WILL MAINTAIN."



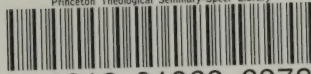




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